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ABSTRACT

A three-year study focused on 120 women in working class jobs (approximately 75% of which were nontraditional) in three major California cities. Emphasis was on searching out factors and processes facilitating greater participation of women in nontraditional blue collar and working class occupations. Attention was given to their personal and work histories: current work or training situation: continuing employment experiences: manner in which they combine work roles with marriage, family, and community roles, and political and social attitudes. Data from open-ended interviews indicated the primacy of a continuous and early-developed sense among respondents that they will and must be employed, with the specific nature of that employment being a secondary concern. More than half of the women showed no prior interest in nontraditional work, and their movement into such fields was directly related to the appearance of a better employment opportunity. They appeared to take advantage of (1) opportunities opened up by government pressure, (2) information supplied by recruitment and counseling programs, and (3) referrals by friends and family. The significance of parents' occupation to career options and choices was also demonstrated. In general, development of specific work commitments and interests evolved as much from opportunities to learn about and participate in specific work roles as it did from gradual development of interests and orientation which lead to occupational preferences. (YLB)

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OPPORTUNITY TO THE MOVEMENT OF WOMEN INTO NONTRADITIONAL BLUE COLLAR JOBS*

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have witnessed a significant increase in the participation of women in the fulltime paid labor force. Although the vast majority of employed women continue to be engaged in clerical and service occupations or sex-typed professions such as nursing or elementary school teaching, there are indications of a small but significant shift in women's professional and vocational interests and choices. Such shifts have been and are being studied extensively by social scientists interested in the career choice processes, work experiences and life-style concerns faced by women in professional fields such as law and college teaching (Theodore 1971; Astin 1969, 1972; Holmstrom 1972; Ginsberg 1966; Epstein 1970; Rossi 1965). However, little or no attention has been given to these processes and issues in the lives of women moving into blue collar and service occupations and particularly nontraditional blue collar jobs. While there is a growing and excellent body of literature on women lawyers, scientists and engineers, it is virtually impossible to locate a similar quantity and quality of attention in research and writing on the woman plumber, welder or carpenter. This is paradoxical in that the employment problems and recent gains of women in these fields appear to be as significant and often more dramatic than the gains in many of the previously male-dominated professions.

Thus, as pointed out by the 1970 Decennial Census:

> ...women workers entered predominantly male fields in large numbers during the 1960's. Data for 1973 from the Current

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Population Survey indicate that the movement of women into nontraditional jobs is continuing.

Perhaps the most dramatic shift that occurred between 1960 and 1970 was the large influx of women into the skilled trades. In 1970 almost half a million women (495,000) were working in the skilled occupations (craft and kindred worker group), up from 277,000 in 1960. The rate of increase (nearly 80 percent) was twice that for women in all occupations. It was 8 times the rate of increase for men in the skilled trades.

Employment increased in almost all the skilled trades--in construction, mechanic and repair, and supervisory blue-collar occupations. Most of the individual craft jobs listed in the 1960 and 1970 censuses showed rates of increase for women that exceeded the rate of growth for men; in some, the numerical increase for women was greater than that for men as well. For example, the employment of women carpenters increased by nearly 8,000 (from about 3,300 to about 11,000), compared with a growth of less than 6,000 among male carpenters. The female share of carpenter employment increased from 0.4 to 1.3 percent. Other skilled trades registering significant gains in employment of women were: electricians from 2,500 to 8,700 (0.7 to 1.8 percent); plumbers from about 1,000 to 4,000 (0.3 to 1.1 percent); auto mechanics from about 2,300 to about 11,000 (0.4 to 1.4 percent); painters from about 6,400 to 13,400 (1.9 to 4.1 percent); tool and die makers from about 1,100 to 4,200 (0.6 to 2.1 percent); and machinists from about 6,700 to about 11,800 (1.3 to 3.1 percent). In one skilled occupation, that of compositor and typesetter, the number of women increased from 15,500 to nearly 24,000 whereas the number of men employed in the occupation declined. (p. 92, 1975 Department of Labor)

Women have also clearly made significant employment gains in some predominantly male professions.

Employment of women lawyers grew from less than 5,000 to more than 12,000 between 1960 and 1970 and women nearly doubled their proportion of all employed lawyers (2.4 to 4.7 percent). Similar gains in employment were made in the medical professions. The number of women physicians increased from about 16,000 to nearly 26,000, and the proportion of doctors who were women rose from 7 to 9 percent. The number of women dentists increased from about 1,900 to more than 3,100 (from 2.3 to 3.4 percent of all dentists). (p. 92, 1975 Department of Labor)

These gains, however, are not as great as those in blue collar and working class occupations. Nonetheless, the attention in the sociological literature continues to emphasize the needs and problems facing women in the professions. This seems disproportionate in light of the overall distribution of women in the labor force and the numerous other areas of growth and activity among female workers. This apparent research bias results to some extent from the ease with which academic social scientists can study and gain access to other professionals. However, it also reflects a more general inattention in the literature on work and career choice processes to the experience of skilled and semi-skilled workers. While social scientists have given a good deal of attention to questions of worker morale and alientation, there appears to be less concern with the development of career/vocational commitments and the integration of such commitments with community and family roles. In a very real sense the sociology of work tends to be a sociology of the work place; the culture of the work group or of the life-style of the worker. Much less attention is paid in the literature to the development of work commitments, the process of learning about, gaining access to and engaging in particular kinds of jobs. And what studies there are on workers and worker culture focus for the most part on the male worker despite the high percentages of women working fulltime in skilled and semi-skilled occupations. (See most recently Blauner 1964, Herrick & Shepherd 1971, LeMasters 1975, Kornblum 1976.)

The purpose of this article, however, is not to present a full-scale

critique of the existing literature. Rather it is to offer a beginning towards searching out the factors and processes facilitating the greater participation of women in nontraditional blue collar and working class occupations. Many of these factors will be parallel to those identified in the literature on professional women and to the literature on blue collar men, but many of them are distinctive to the unique life experience of blue collar and working class women. The data under discussion derive from preliminary findings of intensive case studies on 120 women in working class jobs (approximately 75% of whom are nontraditional) in three major cities in California. These women are being followed over a three-year period and attention is being given to their personal and work histories; their current work or training situation; their continuing employment experiences and the manner in which they combine work roles with marriage, family and community roles. In addition we are collecting a variety of information on political and social attitudes, including attitudes towards sex roles and the women's movement.

Our sample is drawn primarily from work and training settings. The first year of data collection has involved tape-recorded semi-structured interviews. In this way we have been able to capture a sense of the life experience of the women as described and interpreted through their own language and framework of understandings rather than through fixed alternative questionnaire items. In this discussion particular attention will be given to the work experiences and influences which appear, at least in this

initial phase of our analysis , to have facilitated our respondents' entry into nontraditional blue collar work.

Selected descriptive characteristics of the respondents are summarized in the table below.

Table 1
Respondents by Selected Characteristics (N=117)

Race	Age	Education	Estimated Current Family Income
69% Anglo	9% Less than 21	2% Less than 8th Grade	12% Less than $3,000
13% Black	64% 22-30	12% Less than 11th Grade	13% $3,000-5,000
12% Latina	12% 31-40	20% High School	15% $5,001-8,000
3% Asian	10% 41+	44% Some College	9% $8,001-10,000
3% Other	2% Other	15% B.A.	21% $10,001-15,000
		5% Advanced work	18% $15,000+
		3% Other	11% Incomplete Information

Marital Status	N Children at Home
25% Currently	49% None
19% Ever	20% 1-2
37% Never	4% 3-4
19% Incomplete Information	3% 5 or more
	24% Incomplete Information

The following two tables summarize the employment experiences of our respondents to date and list the range of jobs in which they are currently engaged.

Table 2
Selected Employment Characteristics

Mean Number of Jobs Held by Entire Sample	Age of First Paid Employment	Range of Reported Wages for All Jobs Held, Entire Sample
8.2	26% 13 or younger	30% $2 an hour or less
	34% 14-17	14% $2.01-$3.00 an hour
	15% 18+	9% $3.01-$5.00 an hour
	25% Unclear Answer	17% $5 an hour or more
		30% Unclear Answer

Table 3
Types of Jobs Held By Respondents

Traditional	Nontraditional
Cosmetology	Auto mechanics
Electronics assembly	Auto upholstery
Dry cleaning	Welding
Delivery	Small appliance repair
Bus Driver	Electrical
	Plumbing
	Shipfitting/sheet metal heavy trades
	Chef/photographer, i.e., specialized
	Fork lift operator
	Pipefitting
	Production control trainee
	Landscape construction
	Machinist
	Grounds maintenance
	Laborer
	Service technician (appliances)
	Gas meter repair
	Asst. press operator
	Gas dept. helper/operative
	Millner (furniture maker)
	Cabinet maker
	Apprentice electronics mechanic
	Apprentice painter
	Aircraft instrument mechanic
	Engineering technician
	Artificial heart valve polisher
	Motorcycle mechanics
	Aircraft repair (shop learner)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL INTERESTS

The literature on the development of vocational and career interests and commitments is somewhat limited. There is a significant amount of work in the area of vocational testing, but this has recently been criticized by women's groups in particular for the underlying sex-typed biases of both the questions and scoring techniques. In the more sociological arena studies

of the development of career interests and commitments tend to focus on college and professional school students or on retrospective discussions by women who have succeeded in professions. The work of such respected social scientists as Ginzberg, Bernard, Epstein, Davis and others has contributed significantly to our understanding of career interests among such populations. Nonetheless, there is a virtual vacuum when it comes to studies or discussions of blue collar women. For this reason the study in which we are engaged and the discussion to follow consist deliberately of highly descriptive data derived from open-ended interviews with 120 women employed in blue collar and working class jobs. With this method of interviewing we have attempted to capture the respondent's language and framework of understandings when discussing herself and her career interests and avoid the risk of imposing a question-and-response framework derived from studies of primarily educated or professional respondents.

What we feel is distinctive about our initial findings is what appears to be the primacy of a continuous and early-developed sense among our respondents that they will and must always be employed with the specific nature of that employment being a secondary concern. Specific interests and work commitments have grown out of employment experiences rather than being the impetus into particular kinds of jobs. On the surface this appears to contrast with what we typically understand to be the experience of successfully employed middle class women for whom some amount of interest development, planning and preparation precedes actual decisions

about employment (Davis 1965, Astin 1972, Theodore 1971). In fact, much of the literature on such women suggests how parents, counselors, teachers were crucial in helping the woman define her interests and pursue her chosen career (Ginzberg 1966). In contrast, our respondents' experience in the work place and exposure to opportunities seem more crucial to the development of vocational interests than advance planning, preparation and reinforcement from a teacher, parent or counselor. The women describe having a range of interests and potential skills, but receiving very little clear vocational direction from significant others. At the same time they describe themselves as always having expected to work at something. The assumption that they would always work appears to derive from the fact that 60% of the respondents had mothers who worked fulltime and from the fact that with one or two exceptions all of the respondents were engaged in odd jobs or some form of parttime employment by age 14. The majority were out of school and in fulltime paid employment by age 17 or 18 because of direct financial necessity. Thus, it is not surprising that the women typically describe their interests as having grown out of work experience rather than having developed interests which then moved them in the direction of specific jobs. What early interests or achievements the women describe themselves as having often laid dormant or unacted-upon until some kind of employment opportunity presented itself.

The above may seem like an obvious point, but given the tendency to generalize to all women from studies of primarily middle class women,

we might be led to overlook a possibly interesting difference between the two with regard to the relationship between vocational interests and employment decisions. To some extent (and this may be changing with increasing inflation) middle class women appear to develop interests and capacities independent of work experience and seek out employment through which they can express these interests and abilities (Davis 1964, Epstein 1970). Working class women, at least the women we have interviewed, appear to develop interests and capacities in the work environment and to increase commitment and explore options in the context of the work itself rather than in the process of self-exploration and education. (Often this leads us to assume that these women therefore do not have complicated feelings about work and personal identity. Our findings suggest quite the contrary.) In comparison middle class women typically do not or are not encouraged to take paid employment for granted and are more likely to see it as an option rather than a necessity and are more likely to believe, correctly or incorrectly, that one should wait for a job which matches one's interests (Epstein 1970). In contrast, women who need work will take work where it is available. For them the problematic issue is finding satisfaction, interests and security in the jobs open to them rather than resolving the question of whether or not to work, which until recently was characteristic of many better-educated women. Thus the relationship between vocational interests and vocational choice is not a simple one-way relationship, wherein attitudes and interests lead to specific choices, but clearly varies by class, by race

and by other factors limiting the number of life-style alternatives available to a person. As Everett C. Hughes points out, the process of moving into jobs is a complex interaction of personal orientations, structural opportunities and events, and probably a certain amount of luck. From our early findings this process can be described in terms of the formal and informal characteristics of opportunity as experienced by these women in the process of developing vocational interests and commitments.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OPPORTUNITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-TRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL INTERESTS

Many of us have been pessimistic about the real gains of the women's movement and recent federal legislation enacted to foster the development of new skills and more equal employment for women. In quantitative terms the figures are discouraging. Women still occupy a very small percentage of higher-paying, more responsible positions in any job type. Qualitatively, many training and employment opportunities being offered women are done so begrudgingly, with little care or attention to the woman's success. Consequently, women often are eased out or fail after a period of time. On the other hand, what little action there has been appears to be a direct result of the aggressive efforts to equalize employment opportunities for women. These efforts have resulted in certain guidelines and policies which make employers feel they must admit women into nontraditional fields but, more importantly from our point of view, they have created a climate of expectations and readiness which for a small but emerging group of women has

opened the door to increased opportunity. Eighty percent of the women we have interviewed are involved in some sort of vocational school or on-the-job training program, most of which have opened up to women only recently. Although our initial sampling base draws from programs of this nature, the women are quick to describe the significance of the pressures on vocational schools and industry to hire and train women to their own recently improved situations. Numerous respondents indicated that, had the opportunity for this kind of work been present a few years ago, they would have tried it then. Numerous comments from respondents support this. One women stated it this way:

> I: Does being a woman affect your chances of employment in any way?
>
> R: Of course. It's only been the last few years there has been any affirmative action. I'd never have had this job if UPS hadn't been forced to hire women. It wasn't out of their own good will that they hired us. They are doing everything possible to discourage female employment and if it continues---I would think literally thousands of industries have not had a suit brought against them. If you are a woman and you want a job outside the usual female work, it's hard to get it.

It could be argued that until recently women did not pursue numerous trades and crafts jobs, less from a lack of interest or desire for more satisfying, well-paid work than from a complete lack of knowledge of such jobs or from a very realistic sense that they were not wanted and probably would not be given a chance. In the past women who did have some sort of interest in nontraditional skills and the desire for employment with those skills either had to be superwomen who made it on their own or lucky enough on an individual basis to latch on to a skilled crafts or tradesperson who would help

them learn the ropes. With training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities opening up in a systemic way, it is becoming possible for larger numbers and more diverse types of women to enter nontraditional fields.

Many of the women in nontraditional jobs we have interviewed describe work histories moving from traditional jobs such as secretarial work where they could always earn a living to occasional jobs where they could exercise or learn a less traditional skill--an interest which they might have developed while working on the family car with their fathers or in their fathers' woodshop. However, only a small number of women describe a long and discouraging process of being keenly interested in, preparing for and searching for employment in a skilled trade or occupation. Those who have are in fact unusually highly motivated and have often been highly frustrated. Most women with some prior interest swung with the shifts in the labor market opportunities in their geographical area and were pleased to now have a job more suited to their interests. However, more than half of the women we've interviewed have indicated no particular prior interest in nontraditional work, and their movement into nontraditional fields is defined as directly related to the appearance of a better employment opportunity than what they've previously had.

What appears to be the most crucial factor for all the women in our sample is what they would ideally like to get out of work in general given that the vast majority expect to be working their entire lives. Theirs is less an orientation to a particular set of job skills and interests than it is a

desire for certain kinds of personal satisfactions and economic returns for the work they are doing. The centrality of paid employment in the lives of these women as sources of economic, social and personal gratifications creates a readiness in them to explore alternatives, new opportunities as they arise--again, not because they are highly committed to a particular nontraditional skill but because their desire for challenging work and good pay moves them to seriously consider the more challenging, high-paying blue collar skills and trades once opportunities begin to open up. When asked about the sources of interest in their current work, most women expressed concerns with better pay, greater autonomy and more personal challenge than with a compelling interest in a particular nontraditional skill. The women's comments are revealing. One woman stated it this way:

> Good money. In fact that's a big plus factor. When I get really discouraged, I think where else am I gonna make this kind of money. Because even though it's not a skilled job and essentially I'm outside being a janitor, I'm getting $3.89 an hour.
>
> That's very good. I look in the papers and what do they offer? $2.50 and I've worked sometimes at what I consider a skilled job--well receptionist or secretary and they start off at $2.50. And I started at $3.89 right off. That's not fair, but that's because it's a man's job, too.

Another woman indicated her reasons in the following manner:

> Right now I really want to get into something that was interesting to me. Waitressing is not in a way bad, but it is dull, you know, it's the same old stuff, plus it was very physically wearing and this is why I decided I wanted training in appliance repair. I had been thinking about some kind of trade I could get in, and this seemed like it was the most interesting. I enjoyed the training--there's enough to fixing machines so that it's a something to work at, you know, it's just not some-

> thing you automatically do, you think it over and figure it out and this is the kind of work I want to get into because I think I'll enjoy it more, than just more routine, routine--put it into a slot and turn it over and stamp it--that sort of a...thing.

These comments and dozens of similar ones are made in the context of describing how the women got involved in nontraditional work and the significance of paid employment in their lives. In contrast to the stereotype of employed working class women--which focuses on their inconsistent work patterns, desire for sociable and nonchallenging work settings, and their patient ability to do boring, routine work for long periods of time--we are finding women who can do and have done boring, routine work but who still have high levels of career commitment, see work as a source of personal gratification and sieze opportunities when they are there. One wonders how many of the female workers described by Blauner and others as perfectly content with their routine low-paying jobs are rather women resigned to a life of limited work opportunities whose orientations would change were opportunities to change. Our interviews suggest that government pressure has helped open up opportunities in certain areas and many of the women we have interviewed recognize the opportunity and are taking it.

Opportunity does not operate only at the formally legislated structural level. Specially developed recruitment and counseling programs facilitate linking interested employees with training and job programs. In addition they help sponsor media and general public outreach efforts at the local level which inform isolated women of increased opportunities. Programs

such as Advocates for Women in San Francisco, the Career Planning Center in Los Angeles and the Center for Women's Studies and Services in San Diego become important channels of information for working women. Although programs of this type spend very little time with any one woman, a large percentage of women in our sample indicated that they had at some point made contact with these programs and a full 20% are currently involved in training or job experiences as a direct referral from these special programs. A larger percentage, 40%, had some personal contact with these specialized agencies and a majority of our respondents knew of and supported the efforts of these specialized agencies.

Equally important are the informal relationships and channels of communication through which people learn about training and employment opportunities. The Department of Labor's recent Handbook on Women Workers reports the various methods typically used by women looking for work.

> For women, the method of looking for work that was used more than any other method was asking friends. This was followed, in order, by: applying directly to an employer, answering newspaper ads, asking relatives, applying to the State employment service, and applying at private employment agencies--to mention the methods at the top of the list... The method that got the most women their jobs was applying directly to the employer (35 percent). Asking friends and answering newspaper ads were tied for second place (16 percent), and private employment agencies was the next in order (8 percent). Of the various methods used, the one with the highest effectiveness rate was applying directly to the employer (48.5). Of the other popularly used methods, the next highest rates of effectiveness were for private employment agencies (32), answering (not placing) local newspaper ads (28), asking friends about jobs where they work (20.5).
>
> Generally, there was considerable similarity between women and men in the degree to which they used the various jobseeking

> methods and in the distribution of methods that got them their jobs. However, much smaller proportions of women than men reported asking friends and relatives, and using the State employment service and hiring rolls. (p. 73, 1975 Department of Labor)

The experiences of the nontraditional working women in our sample are not dissimilar. Referrals by friends and family and encouragement and information from coworkers accounted for close to 40% of the women's current positions. Personnally initiated job-seeking and agency/program referral accounted for the next two most significant sources of information.

The literature on careers also suggests the significance of parents' occupation to career options and choices (Davis, 1965). In addition to providing specific resources and information, the job a parent or relative or neighbor has provides the growing child with some image of the world of work in general as well as the world of a particular trade or profession. Certain jobs and their requirements are thus to some extent demystified, taken for granted, particularly if they are jobs about which a child can gain information and insight because they are performed around the home, near home or because the child is taken to the work place or talked to about parents' work. When a child does not see or share in the parents' work it is more mysterious. If the parents' work roles and access to other occupations is very limited, it is likely the child will see certain kinds of work as very special, mysterious and inaccessible. This is doubtless true for both men and women. However, as formal and informal expectations of men require that they be interested in and informed about work and employment roles, they are more likely to search out possibilities. The absence

of such general expectations of women makes informal access to learning about the content and nature of specific kinds of jobs quite possibly more important developmentally. The world of paid employment and particularly paid employment in those numerous jobs typically closed to women needs to be demystified for it to become a world about which a woman feels knowledgeable and confident. It appears from our preliminary analysis that a disproportionate number of women entering nontraditional jobs identify directly (ca. 40%) or indirectly (ca. 18%) an early childhood relationship which included access to and learning about nontraditional work skills. Numerous women offered comments describing the routine way in which they learned about mechanics or wiring or carpentry from a relative or friend and how they only learned subsequently that such knowledge or skills were considered unfeminine or unacceptable. One woman put it this way:

> I: While you were growing up, what were your fantasies and hopes for the future?
> R: I thought I'd be a lot of different things. When I was about 14 I got interested in the forest service and my aunt worked for the forest service there in Colorado. She was a stenographer and I thought "yeah, I'd like to be a forest ranger, that sounds all right" but they don't have women forest rangers and I would have had to do something else. And I thought "wow that's dead, I want to be out there having all the fun" but don't even think like that--women just weren't qualified. I don't know what the qualifications were but they just--it just wasn't a field a woman went into. Maybe I could apply for a forest ranger today and get it but when I was inquiring then my aunt would tell me "be sensible, be something you can be."

To emphasize an earlier point, however, the women who identified some kind of access or foreknowledge about nontraditional skills in the main did not go on to describe themselves as having compelling personal or voca-

tional interests in these skills, for they learned early that there weren't opportunities for women in these fields. Rather, they moved into fields slowly. It's possible that some exposure sufficiently demystifies traditionally male strongholds so that as opportunities begin to open up, women aren't quite as frightened or overwhelmed by the idea that the jobs require special skills, strengths or aptitudes which were previously considered alien to them. From their informal access, they know the real content of the job and see it as "no big thing." Thus they are interested. They at least have some idea of what will be involved in the work; they have some sense of the better pay and greater challenge and they are not easily scared off by the claims that men's work is somehow more complex, difficult and demanding. Some of the statements from the women in this regard are revealing. The following is representative:

> I've always liked tools and I always liked to play in father's workbench. It never occurred to me that I would ever be a plumber, until somebody handed me a wrench and said "hop to it." I just happened to run into that particular opportunity, but like if I happened to have met somebody who needed somebody to work with who did another kind of work, I probably would have done that instead. Cause I really didn't know very much about it when I started.

Another woman made the point in this way:

> Okay, for one thing, I don't think your strength is really that important. Like women can lift like 50-pound kids, you know, things like that, so if you can lift a 50-pound crying brat, I think you can lift a piece of steel that's just sitting there in a form.

Another woman described how her various work experiences slowly developed a sense of herself as a person who could do physically demanding labor:

> ...my vision of my body has been changing slowly over the years-- I've always been pretty unathletic, then I started taking yoga classes

> a couple of years ago and getting more into that and thinking more about my body and that has a lot to do with being in California where everybody's into some kind of health thing. So I was thinking more and more about my body, and it was getting stronger, you know, it's not super-powerful or anything but it--you know, just building that up. And then this summer, most of the work I was doing was physical, like when I worked for the plant store I'd be lugging plants in and out and the housecleaning, you know, was fairly physical work, even though it wasn't real hard or anything. I was kind of scared about--like, I knew that there was a little more money and advocates for women were getting women into more hard-core jobs, but I was still equivocating about it even when I went down to East Bay MUD. The whole night before I was supposed to show up for work there, I thought, you know, I'm gonna go there, I won't be able to do it--I'm gonna be fired, laid off in a week, you know, because it'll just be--absurd. And it turned out it just wasn't physically that difficult. There was nothing overpowering that I couldn't do or that the men couldn't do if I couldn't do it, and it still wouldn't be a bad thing.

A majority of the women nonetheless enter nontraditional jobs with very little prior information or sense of what the particular job skills and requirements are. As noted earlier, this knowledge and a clearly articulated set of interests seems less important to the women in our sample moving into nontraditional jobs than a generally high commitment to work itself, a desire for challenge and economic gain and an opportunity to realize it. We have interviewed a number of "Doris Day types" (to use a popular stereotype) in such fields as shipbuilding, airplane repair and forklifting whose job histories reflect a string of traditional jobs until the opportunity for better pay and more autonomy arises in an unfamiliar but promising nontraditional field. Such women take a chance on the new opportunity and find they develop commitments and interests subsequent to actual experience in the field. A quote from one such respondent summarizes

this phenomenon perfectly.

> The good things about working at this job is that I'm really learning a lot, like I said, every week I change what I'm doing and if I don't learn it well, they keep me there an additional week. They make sure that we know what we're doing and I really enjoy that because I feel like I'm accomplishing something, whereas before where I was working it was routine and you could not see anything from it, you know, you were helping somebody else, but you weren't helping yourself. With the training program, you really feel like you're learning something so you're helping yourself, you feel good about it.
>
> With the job itself, the parts that we're doing, they go in the airplane and I've really been getting into airplanes and old movies and go to the library and look at the books there. I've really taken notice of this type of thing a lot more so that's good, too, because I never really had a special interest that I really got into like I am with that.

General impressions from the data thus far lead one to believe that an understanding of the development of specific work commitments and interests evolves as much from opportunities to learn about and participate in specific work roles (either formally or informally) as it does from the gradual development of interests and orientations which locate themselves in particular occupational preferences in which one eventually seeks training and employment. This latter model of the development of career orientations may be appropriate to upper middle class professions, but even here it is likely that luck, chance and opportunity play as significant a role as clearly articulated values, commitments and planning.

What is being suggested here is not a particularly new idea. The work of Everett C. Hughes and his students has stressed this sort of process for a number of years. However, it needs greater emphasis in both the sociological and policy literature. We are overly preoccupied with the

notion that if people, particularly women and minorities, are really interested in certain roles they'd go after them, and the fact that they don't go after them or participate in them is an indication that they're perfectly happy where they are. Far too many graduate professors of sociology as well as union leaders have made such comments for one to believe that the prejudices vary that significantly. The interpretation offered here would suggest that in the absence of access and opportunity, it is not surprising that only very few pursue fields which are for most mysterious and inhospitable. But as fields become demystified and open through both formal and informal mechanisms, surprising numbers and types of people begin pursuing them. The women we are talking with who are entering nontraditional jobs are not easily pigeonholed. They are not bull dykes, hefty athletic types, poverty-stricken welfare mothers, opportunistic job seekers or economically driven working women. They are in fact a heterogencus, seriously work-minded group of women. The most crucial characteristic they have in common is a need and a desire to work and to grow in their work and access to opportunities not previously available.

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